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ABSTRACT

At Santa Fe Community College (SFCC), a proactive, "intrusive" approach to counseling has been developed to identify students who may be at the point of dropping out of classes due to anxiety and frustration. Under this approach, termed the Early Alert Referral System, the advisor takes responsibility for establishing contact with the students and addressing their needs before they become problems or barriers to success. First, the instructor fills out a form and sends it to the Admissions and Records Office if s/he believes the student is experiencing difficulties. If the student is still enrolled in the course, advisors in the Guidance Services Office will attempt to contact the student by phone to inform him/her of the instructor's concern and to let him/her know of the services (e.g., counseling, educational and career advisement, and tutoring) that are available to aid students in resolving difficulties. The instructor is then informed of the outcome of the contact. Since the initiation of the Early Alert Referral System, it has proved to be an effective tool in identifying students with academic or other problems and for referring them to appropriate sources of assistance. During 1984, 383 students were referred through the system. Of these students, 287 subsequently addressed the issues that were interfering with their academic program. Although 109 students withdrew from SFCC, in 92 of these cases, withdrawal was seen as the best course of action given the individual's situation. (HB)

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"EARLY ALERT: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AS THE FOCUS OF INTRUSIVE COUNSELING"

PRESENTED TO:
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES'
1985 CONVENTION
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

APRIL 16, 1985

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"EARLY ALERT": Academic achievement as the focus of intrusive counseling

As Santa Fe Community College opened its doors to the public in the fall of 1983 it became apparent that students achieving academic success were more likely to persist in college than those experiencing academic failures or other difficulties. The most critical aspect of our program planning and coordination as a Guidance Services Department was the ability to anticipate areas and periods of greatest student anxiety and frustration and to develop services that addressed the causes of those reactions. Obviously, no program could possibly address all of the problems and needs of our students. Therefore, it was necessary for us as program planners to identify which student needs and problems would be addressed, and more importantly, how we could go about addressing them.

A number of student issues were identified:

1. Lack of financial resources to meet college expenses.

2. Academic skill deficiencies, Inadequate academic exposure.

3. Transportation issues

4. Vague educational and career plans

5. Difficulty in adjusting to the campus.

6. Difficulty in adjusting to the role of student

7. Family and domestic issues.

8. Time management issues.

9. Job conflict.

These potential problem areas were seen as products of the environments from which students came to Santa Fe Community College rather than automatic barriers to academic success. It was nonetheless critical to understand that these potential problem areas create anxiety and frustration and that failure and the subsequent dropping out from courses is one method used to cope with the adverse reactions of anxiety and frustration (Anderson, 1978). Therefore, in order to adequately address these issues, our program of services must include interventions against this anxiety and frustration.

Assuming that students who need services most tend to request them least, we have designed our program to monitor student progress and performance and detect fluctuations which might reveal issues that become problems impinging upon students' success. When these fluctuations occur, the program takes an "intrusive" initiative in contacting students and encouraging them to utilize our campus support services or other outside agencies.

The intrusive character of the program is based on the assumption that a college cannot be passive and wait for students to seek advisement and counseling. The word intrusive connotes a tendency to thrust into the affairs of others or to be unduly curious about another's concerns (Glennen, 1976). Intrusive counseling is a proactive approach in which the advisor takes responsibility for establishing contact with students and addressing their needs before they become problems or barriers to success.

Based on an institutional policy of a students' "right to succeed", (Roueche, 81-82) an intrusive counseling, referral model was adopted to provide the foundation for high student success. By "right to succeed", it is meant that Santa Fe Community College is committed to responsible policy development enabling entering students to make responsible academic decisions given their marked diversity. Our definition of student success is that students who come to college with diverse needs are helped-and that most of them who take coursework persist with solid evidence of course and program achievement. For example, students are allowed to change their status from "credit" to "audit" until the end of the last day before midterm examinations begin (Appendix A). Students are also given the opportunity to drop one or all courses up to the last day before the beginning of "finals" (Appendix A). In this way the students who may be unable to finish the course(s) for credit because of a variety of issues, are able to make responsible and informed choices regarding their status while succeeding in acquiring the information from the course(s). Moreover, their academic standing is not adversely affected or compounded, by late arising issues. Also, the institution encourages the use of "PR" (progress repeat) grades for selected courses. The "PR" evaluation indicates progress for the course(s) and is a recommendation that the course(s) be repeated before the student(s) can advance to the next level. No honor points are earned and the credit is not computed in the grade point average, nor is it counted toward graduation. Again, the students' academic record/transcript is "protected" while giving students the opportunity to achieve success.

THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The Model

Within the context of a students' "right to succeed," the model known as the Early Alert Referral System was adopted in the spring of 1984. It is a first step in identifying students who may be experiencing anxiety or frustration resulting from academic or other difficulties, and is a referral vehicle for those students to appropriate resources for help.

The Process

The instructor making the referral initiates the process by filling out the Instructor's section of the form and returns it to the Admissions and Records Office (Appendix B, Part 1). The registration status of the student will then be verified within two working days of its receipt.

If the student has dropped the course, has changed sections, or changed to "audit" status, the Admissions and Records Office informs the instructor by returning the form, or a copy of the form, to the Guidance Office to be place in the student's file (Appendix B, Part II). If the student is still enrolled in the course(s), the Early Alert form is then forwarded to the Guidance Services Office whose advisors will attempt to contact the student by telephone (Appendix B, Part III).

When contact is achieved the student is informed of the instructor's concern for the student's successful achievement in the particular course(s). The student is also told of the various support services that are available such as personal counseling, academic advisement, educational and career advisement, individual tutoring available for all subject areas (paid for by the institution), individual practice sets on study skills, and "Brown Bag" workshops on college adjustment. The student is also notified of the last day to change status from

"credit" to "audit" and/or the last day to withdraw. The student is also urged to make an appointment with an advisor from the Guidance Services Office, to return to class(es), and to speak with the instructor making the referral.

If the student is not contacted by telephone, the Guidance Services Office will send a letter requesting that the student call or visit the Guidance Services Office and the instructor (Appendices C-1 and C-2).

In either case, the instructor is informed of the results of the contact and a copy of the completed form is placed in the student's file (Appendix B, Part IV). Approximately one week is allowed for action to be taken from initial referral through the follow-up to the instructor.

Why & How It Works

It is essential that the faculty receive thorough training on the system in order for each instructor to understand and recognize the signs of anxiety and frustration. They are then able to make the appropriate referral through the system (Appendix D).

The Instructional Division, the Department of Admissions and Records, and the Guidance Services Department must each understand their responsibilities for each step of the process thereby enabling Guidance Services advisors to make timely contact with the students and help them address their issues before they become problems.

Since the Early Alert System was initiated it has proven to be an effective tool in identifying students with academic or other issues and for referring those students to appropriate resources for assistance.

For example, during the spring semester of 1984 a total of 383 students were referred through the Early Alert System. This number represents 31% of the total enrollment of 1226 students. Of the students referred, 287 (75%) who were able to be contacted (86 students could not be contacted but were sent a letter of concern inviting them to see a Guidance Services' advisor) subsequently addressed the issues interfering with the academic program.

While a total of 109 students withdrew from college, 92 (84%) were referred through the Early Alert System and subsequently decided that this was the best course of action based on the individual's situation. Of the 383 students referred through the Early Alert system, 152 (40%) indicated that they would indeed return to class and complete the semester. The decision to return and the decision to withdraw are then informed choices based on a students' situation. This increases a sense of success in the students, as well as helps students persevere in college.

So far this spring semester (1985) a total of 124 students have been referred through the Early Alert System (from the census date until midterms, March 8) representing 8% of the 1578 students enrolled. Of the 124 students referred, 38 (31%) indicated they would return to class, 70 (56%) indicated they would drop one or more courses, while 16 (13%) could not be contacted by telephone but were sent a letter of concern inviting them to see a Guidance Services' advisor.

Current Developments

The Early Alert Referral program is regularly evaluated and is modified as the need arises. We are putting the program "on-line" on the computer, making it accessible to the staff and instructors (Appendices E-1 and E-2). We have begun to utilize paraprofessional counselors (students) in the initial contacts of those students who are referred by the system. This has been met with much acceptance and success. The system continues to provide students with the needed help for academic success and contirues to prove itself as a necessary step in supporting our students in their academic and personal development.

Future Considerations

Is informed withdrawal success? Should advised withdrawal at the end of the semester be a concern? Why are students waiting so long to address their issues?

Conclusions

Students respond favorably to the attention. There is a feeling of goodwill toward the institution that can be translated into a return to Santa Fe Community College.

References

Anderson, Edward. "A Retention Design Applied to an Equal Opportunity Program." In L. Noel (Ed.), New Directions for Student Services. 1978, (3), 37-46.

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Roueche, John E. "Don't Close the Door," Community and Junior College Journal. 1981-1982, 52 (4); 17, 21-23.

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Hurst, James C. "W.W.I.S.R. Scale (What Works In Student Retention). - Campus Ecology: The Impact on College Student Personnel Work." In D.G. Creamer (Ed.) Student Development In High Education. Cincinnati: American College Personnel Association, 1980.

Kawalski, Cash. The Impact of College On Persisting and Non-Persisting Students. New York: Philosophical Library, 1977.

Noel, Lee. (Guest Edit.), "Reducing the Dropout Rate", New Directions for Student Services, No. 3 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1978.

Pascarella, Ernest T., (Ed.). "Studying Student Attrition," New Directions for Institution Research, No. 36. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1982.

SPRING SEMESTER 1985

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

First Day of Class	Monday, January 14
Late Registration and Schedule Changes (add/drop)	Monday-Friday, January 14-18
Last Day to Petition for Graduation	Friday, January 18
Last Day to Add a Course	Friday, January 18
Last Day to Drop/Withdraw Without a Grade (No grade on record)	Friday, February 8
Last Day to Change from "audit" to "credit" or "credit" to "audit"	Friday, March 8
MID-TERM EXAMINATIONS	Monday-Friday, March 11-15
SPRING BREAK	Monday-Friday March 18-22
Holiday (Easter Weekend)	Friday-Monday, April 5-8
Last Day to Drop/Withdraw ("w" on record)	Friday, May 3
Final Exam Week	Monday-Friday, May 6-10
Semester Ends	Friday, May 10
Graduation Ceremony	Saturday, May 11

SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE 4/85
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENT EARLY ALERT REFERRAL FORM

PLEASE NOTE: It is strongly recommended that the person making the referral begin by first trying to contact the student. Date of referral ___/___/___

PART I: (To be completed by Instructor or person making referral)

Student Name: _____ SS#: ___/___/___

Reason for student referral: (e.g., Study Skills, Text Anxiety, Job/Finances, Absences; Personal Issues.) _____

_____

Instructor: _____ Dept. _____ Course # _____ Section # ____

Class meeting day(s) _____ Time _____ Location _____

Previous action taken by instructor (e.g.: spoke to student; date-re:absences referred to another department or agency)

_____

_____

$$$

Santa Fe Community College

P.O. Box 4187
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502
(505) 471-8200

April 8, 1985

!FIRST_NAME! !LAST_NAME!
!MAILING_ADDRESS!
!CITY!, !STATE! !ZIP!

Dear: !FIRST_NAME!

Santa Fe Community College has begun a program called EARLY ALERT. The purpose of this program is to help students who are experiencing any kind of difficulties in school.

The Guidance Services Office has recently received an EARLY ALERT form from your instructor stating that you have been absent from class. Because attendance is an important part of doing well in school, your instructors and I are concerned about you. Our counselors are available to listen and/or help you in any way possible.

Please schedule an appointment today either by calling 471-8200, Ext. 21, or by coming to the Guidance Services Office. Our counseling staff looks forward to hearing from you so that we can inform you of the various support services available to help you succeed in your class(es) for this term.

If you are not planning on returning to class you must WITHDRAW OFFICIALLY through the Office of Admissions and Records, or you will recieve a grade of F for your class(es) for the semester. And, a call to your instructor will be helpful to inform him or her of your intentions.

Please keep in mind that the last day to Withdraw with a "W" on your record is Friday, May 3.

Sincerely,

Roberto Martinez
Counselor, Guidance Services

RM/cv

Dr. Joe L. Hernandez, *Chairman* — Gene Fulgenzi, *Vice Chairman* — Gloria M. Lopez Gomez, *Secretary*
Albert "Al" Romero, *Member* — Michael Francke, *Member* — William C. Witter, *President*

Santa Fe
Community College

P.O. Box 4187
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Please keep in mind that the last day to change from "credit" to "audit" and "audit" to "credit" is March 8, 1985.

Sincerely,

Roberto Martinez
Counselor, Guidance Services

RM/cv

Dr. Joe L. Hernandez, *Chairman* — Gene Fulgenzi, *Vice Chairman* — Gloria M. Lopez Gomez, *Secretary*
Albert "Al" Romero, *Member* — Michael Francke, *Member* — William C. Witter, *President*

January 3, 1984

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Faculty

FR: Roberto Martinez, Guidance Services

RE: Early Alert System

SFCC has begun an "Early Alert" referral system. If properly used, it can be the first step in identifying a student who is experiencing academic or other difficulties, and can lead to referring that student to appropriate resources for help.

The Instructor making the referral initiates the process by filling out the Instructor's section and returns the form to the Admissions and Records Office. They will then verify the registration status of the student within two working days of its receipt.

If the course was dropped or the student has changed sections, the Admissions and Records Office will inform the instructor by returning the form to him or her and a copy of the form will be sent to Guidance Services to be placed in the student's file. If the student is still enrolled in the course(s), the Early Alert form is then forwarded to the Guidance Services Office who will attempt contact with the student by telephone.

If the student is unable to be contacted by telephone, the Guidance Services Office will send a letter requesting that the student call or visit the Guidance Services Office and his or her instructor. In any case, the Instructor will be informed of the results of the contact, as well as a copy of the form will be placed in the student's file. Please allow one week for action to be taken from initial referral thru the follow-up to instructor.

Our counselors are eager to get in touch with these students to provide whatever assistance necessary to increase the students' chances of successful completion of your course(s).

Your previous efforts with the student absence follow-up form have proven to be very helpful to both the students and the institution.

Additional Early Alert forms are available in the Guidance Services Office at SFCC, or from the advisor on duty in the teacher's lounge area of the portable classrooms at Santa Fe High School.

If you have any questions regarding the system please contact the Guidance Services Office, 471-8200 ext 37.

Thank you for your cooperation!

SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE 4/85
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

COMPUTERIZED INFORMATION BASE (DBASE III)

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    2  LASTNAME    Character     15
    3  FIRST       Character     15
    4  SS_NMBR     Character      9
    5  REASON_REF  Character     15
    6  INSTRUCTOR  Character     12
    7  DEPARTMENT  Character      5
    8  COURSE_NMB  Character      4
    9  SECTION     Character      2
   10  OUTCOME     Character     30
   11  DATE_LETTE  Character      8
   12  FOLLOW_UP   Character      1
** Total **                     125
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SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE 4/85
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

EARLY ALERT FORM CODES

CODE NUMBERS	QUESTION # 7, REASON FOR REFERRAL
1	Study Skills
2	Text Anxiety
3	Job/Finances
4	Absences
5	Personal Issues

OUTCOME

CODE NUMBERS	QUESTION # 13, OUTCOME
11	changed from credit to audit
12	changed sections
13	could not be contacted by telephone but were sent a letter
14	dropped the class
15	indicates a return to class(es)
16	referred to Division Head
17	referred for financial assistance
18	referred for personal counseling
19	referred for tutoring
20	withdrew from SFCC

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SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE 4/85
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM: ROBERTO MARTINEZ, COUNSELOR

SUBJECT: EARLY ALERT REFERRAL SUMMARY REPORT

DATE:

Beginning Spring 1984, an Early Alert Referral System was initiated to provide assistance to students experiencing school related difficulties. The following data indicate the results of the student contacts made in conjunction with the Admissions and Records Office.

FROM DATE THROUGH DATE:

_____ Number of referrals made through Early Alert System

_____ Number of students referred by faculty and staff for contact

_____ Number of referrals due to absence

_____ Number of referrals due to problems other than absence from classes

Percentages Based On Number of Referrals Made Through Early Alert System

_____% of students contacted who indicated they would return to class

_____% of students contacted who changed class section

_____% of students contacted who changed from credit to audit

_____% of students referred to other departments or agencies for assistance

_____% of students contacted who dropped the class

_____% of students contacted who withdrew from school

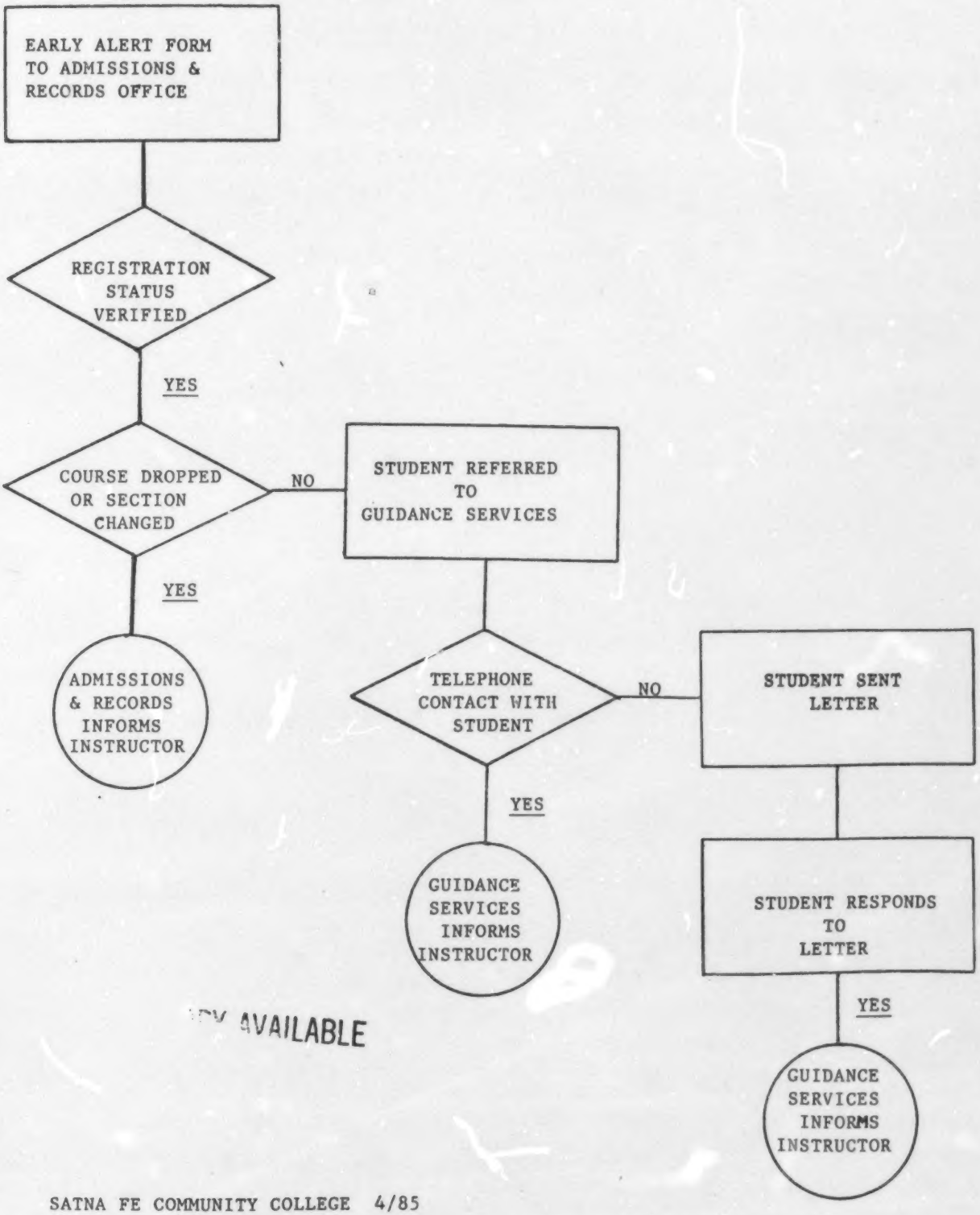
_____% of students could not be contacted by telephone but were sent a letter of concern inviting the student to make an appointment at the Guidance Services Office for assistance

Summary: _____

_____

_____

FLOW CHART OF
KEY ACTIVITIES FOR
EARLY ALERT SYSTEM



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